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ABSTRACT

The results of a survey of 225 primary school teachers indicate that a high proportion of children in the primary grades are in classrooms that use the basal reader approach. In addition, it is apparent that the vast majority are assigned to either a high, medium, or low group. Once this assignment is made, it becomes difficult for a child to be reevaluated and placed in a different group. Further indications are that few teachers allocate time on a regular basis to regroup children according to immediate needs. Variations in the basic three-group concept are valuable because the more immediate needs of the students are met, children who would not benefit from work in a particular competency are not forced to waste time in a group which is not valuable, and by keeping some groupings flexible teachers are allowed to be more creative and innovative and do not have to stick to rigid guidelines. Possible variations include forming groups related to specific skills, special interests, main idea comprehension, sequence comprehension, vocabulary development, and supporting details comprehension. (TJ)

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ADAPTING GROUPING PATTERNS TO MAXIMIZE READING ACHIEVEMENT
WITHIN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM

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The small child studied the three objects that lay before him—a ball, a banana, and an orange. "Should I group the orange with the ball because they are both round or with the banana because they are both fruit"? he asked. The child could be justified in making either grouping, depending on the criteria for so doing. The orange has characteristics similar to both the banana and the ball, yet is not identical to either.

Similarly, it is with children. Whether Mary is placed in a reading group with John or with Jim depends entirely on the criteria for making the placement. For example, if the teacher uses intelligence scores as the basis for the group placement and Mary and Jim have an I.Q. in the high average range, they may be put together. Whereas, if the criteria for the placement is reading comprehension and Mary scores closer to Jim in that area, she may be placed with Jim. If vocabulary or speed and accuracy are used as determinants for group placement, the children may be grouped in a completely different manner. In a typical 3rd grade classroom the range of reading abilities is from grade 1.5 to grade 4.5. (Lapp and Flood).

Not only is the grouping dependent on the criteria established, but also how that criteria is measured. For instance, if a teacher decides to group the children in her room according to comprehension ability, she may determine a child's ability from results obtained on standardized achievement tests, criterion referenced tests, informal measures such as teacher judgment, or a combination of these variables. Thus, the child may be placed in one of several groups depending on the criteria selected and how it is measured.

What should be the main determiner and what criteria should be considered when establishing a child's group placement? Is it better to use one set of criteria as opposed to another?

Many children are placed in a specific group because of the results achieved on one particular test. Readiness tests are taken by a large majority of children in kindergarten. Results obtained from these tests are used to group children even

though their predictive value has been seriously questioned. (Durkin). What the main considerations for group placement should be are the individual needs of the children and the specific competencies to be taught in the lesson based on these individual needs. Groupings should remain flexible in order that children can easily move from one group to another. Unfortunately, many children remain in the same group throughout their school years and no effort is made to move the child from one group to another despite the fact that his needs can no longer be met from the group in which he is presently placed.

Results of a recent survey conducted by the authors showed a high proportion of the 225 teachers that were randomly sampled from grades one, two, and three use the Basal Reader Approach (see Table A). An effort was made to determine what organizational pattern was implemented by the 203 teachers who adopted the Basal Reader Approach. The most common organizational pattern used by teachers was to divide the class into three subgroups (see Table B). Statistics further indicated that once the groups were established few children were changed from one group to another, even though they had been in school for five months. A questionnaire was sent out four months after the beginning of the school year. In response to the question, "After you firmly established the particular group in which each child will be placed, have you changed a child from one group to another during this particular year?" The responses obtained from the teachers (see Table C) indicated that once a child was assigned to a particular group, he would most likely remain in that group. Finally, in trying to analyze the amount of regrouping for specific skills development that was done, teachers were asked if they had designated a specific time slot in which they regrouped children to meet their more immediate needs. Results (see Table D) showed that little regrouping was done.

Developing Flexibility in Grouping Procedures

Many teachers find the three group concept where an entire class is divided into subgroups high, medium and low, both efficient and practical. While the teacher may find that the three group concept offers many advantages, variations in

grouping procedures should be implemented to maximize the learning of the individual child. A primary objective for the teacher becomes one of organizing the classroom to permit each child's progress "in the acquisition of sequenced developmental reading skills." (Zintz).

How may a teacher maintain the basic three group concept, and at the same time regroup children according to specific competencies to be mastered?

The following is a typical, fourth grade class. The teacher has divided the children into three groups, A, B, and C. S(he) uses the Basal Reader as the core of her reading lesson on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Chart A

<u>Monday, Wednesday, Friday</u>			
Mary		9-9:30	Work with Teacher
Jim			
Tad	Group A	9:30-10	Independent work at desk
Owen			
Bill		10-10:30	Learning Center
Jan			
Jeff			
Candy		9-9:30	Pupil Partners
Alan			
Hank	Group B	9:30-10	Work with Teacher
Ernie			
Sandy		10-10:30	Independent work at desk
Fred			
Sarah			
Randy		9-9:30	Independent work at desk
Christy			
Kathy	Group C	9:30-10	Free Reading
Gwen			
Beth		10-10:30	Work with Teacher
Tom			
Jenny			
Dan			

On Tuesday and Thursday, children are no longer placed in either groups A, B, or C. Rather a completely different organizational pattern is in effect. Since the criteria for group placement is now completely different and may change frequently children are not placed in a set group for an extended period of time. The group

in which a child is placed is determined by specific, immediate needs. The following illustrates how a teacher may reorganize an entire class in order to maximize teaching-learning effectiveness. It is important to note that in the regrouping process, children from group A may be placed with children from either groups B or C and vice versa.

	Tuesday	Thursday
9-9:30	Specific Skills blends--bl, tr, skr	Comprehension - Sequence
9:30-10	Special Interest Groups	Vocabulary Development
10-10:30	Comprehension--Main Idea	Comprehension--Supporting details

Specific Skills

Mary, Jan, Jeff, Candy, Ernie and Randy need help with the following blends, bl, tr, skr. They are grouped together for skills activities on these specific blends.

Special Interest

Jim, Tad, Hank, Kathy, and Beth share a common interest in dinosaurs--They form a new group to share articles they have read on dinosaurs. Each child may be reading materials of various levels of difficulty, but based on common subject matter.

Comprehension--Main Idea

The teacher had noted that Owen, Bill, Alan, Sandy, Fred, and Sarah need help in determining the main idea of a paragraph. Hence, these children are regrouped for work in the specific skill.

Comprehension--Sequence

All but four children need assistance in sequencing. The four children work at the learning centers, while the teacher conducts a lesson on sequencing with the other seventeen children.

Vocabulary Development

The entire class participates in this lesson. Each child contributes several words to the vocabulary list selected from their individual readings. All the words are discussed and meanings shared.

Comprehension--Supporting Details

This lesson involves only the children from the various groups who need help in finding the supporting details in a paragraph. First an oral lesson is conducted where the teacher reads a paragraph and states an opinion or fact. The students then list all the details that support the fact or opinion.

Summary and Conclusion

Based on the results of the survey, it is evident that a high proportion of children in the primary grades are in a classroom that uses the Basal Reader approach. In addition it becomes apparent that the vast majority are assigned to either a high, medium or low group. Once this assignment is made, it becomes difficult for a child to be reevaluated and placed in a different group. Further indications are that few teachers allocate time on a regular basis to regroup children according to immediate needs.

Variations in the basic three group concept are valuable for the following reasons. The more immediate needs of the students are met. Children who would not benefit from work in a particular competency are not forced to waste time in a group which is not valuable. Further, by keeping some groupings flexible, teachers are allowed to be more creative and innovative and do not have to stick to rigid guidelines. Pupils in the lowest group are sometimes placed with pupils in the highest group. This helps the children develop a more positive self concept because they now identify with the more able readers.

TABLE A

No. of teachers using each of the following approaches in Grades one,
two and three

	Basal	Individualized	Language Experience	Other
Gr. I	70	3	2	0
Gr. II	65	9	0	1
Gr. III	<u>68</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>—</u>
Total	203	15	6	1

TABLE B

The following graph indicates the number of subgroups each teacher who used the
Basal Approach organized in her classroom

	2 Subgroups	3 Subgroups	More than 3	No set grouping pattern	Total
Gr. I	5	60	5	0	70
Gr. II	7	50	8		65
Gr. III	2	60	6	0	68

TABLE C

Of the 203 teachers using the Basal Reader Approach that were surveyed no. of teachers that moved children from one group to the next

Question: After the groups became firmly established, I have, have not moved children from one group to another

Responses	Have	Have Not	
Gr. I	10	60	70
Gr. II	5	60	65
Gr. III	<u>6</u>	<u>62</u>	<u>68</u>
	21	182	203

TABLE D

Of the 203 teachers using the Basal Reader Approach, no. of teachers that regrouped children.

Question: I have (have not) a designated period of time every week set aside to regroup children to meet more specific need

	do	do not	total
Gr. I	2	68	70
Gr. II	0	65	65
Gr. III	8	60	68

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